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SUBJECT: TARIQ RAMADAN ENCOURAGES SENEGALESE MUSLIMS TO
SEEK POWER IN A DEMOCRATIC CONTEXT

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) Tariq Ramadan, the Islamic scholar of Egyptian origin, gave a series of conferences to Islamic audiences in Senegal in August. His talks drew large audiences and enthusiastic press coverage, focused on his dual messages encouraging Muslims to take active part in politics but, at the same time, to do so with a critical, democratic approach. Ramadan presented his audience with a different and softer approach to Islam, one in contrast to fundamentalist views which have, thus far, fallen on largely deaf ears in Senegal.
END SUMMARY.

DRAWING MUSLIMS TO POLITICS AND DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES

12. (U) Invited by the Association of Muslim Students of Senegal, Ramadan spoke at their summer camp, the University of Dakar, and the Islamic Institute of Dakar. He was given a warm welcome by the press and the Western Islamic elite, as well as by the traditional Tidiane Brotherhood, the largest Islamic grouping in Senegal. He urged his audiences to become politically involved and to identify principles of democracy that are "trans-historic," or able to endure. He also said these democratic principles should be applied to a model constructed to suit Muslim societies and in congruence with Muslim beliefs and values. He singled out the tenets of equality of citizens, separation of powers, majority rule, and accountability as fundamental and universal.

WARNING AGAINST APPLYING ANACHRONISTIC MODELS

13. (U) Ramadan tempered his message with a warning against the temptation to apply historic models, such as the system used by the Prophet Mohammed in Medina in the Seventh Century. Ramadan said such a system would not allow Muslims to manage a "neighborhood" in modern societies, let alone an entire country. He invited Muslims to make a methodological difference between what belongs to dogma (Ibadat), which can not be discussed or altered, and what belongs to the realm of politics and social affairs (Muhamalat) in which Muslims should exercise creativity and the right to dissent.

CRITICIZING GOS MEASURES, AFRICAN LEADERS, AND US DEMOCRACY

14. (U) Criticizing GOS arrests of opponents and African presidents who are "democratically elected for life," he called for Muslims to be introspective. At the same time, he asked them to resist cultural alienation and the ideology spread by "orientalists" in Western academic institutions, whom he accused of deliberately confusing "reformists" and "terrorists" and of decreeing that Islam is incompatible with modern democracy. Ramadan lashed out at what he referred to as distortions of democracy in the United States, labeling it

a "democracy for the wealthy." He added that Muslims should resist all forms of manipulation by large corporations and the media that infiltrate the political process and influence decisions in non-democratic ways.

COMMENT

15. (SBU) Ramadan's remarks presented a more approachable context to the Islamic Brotherhoods and served as an encouragement to both Islamic elites and traditional Muslim leaders. He argued that Islam can provide ethics to supplement what he considers the deficient democratic models currently in place. The favorable echo received by his message is an indication of the timid but growing desire among some of Senegal's younger Muslim leaders to play a political role to have direct access to power, rather than remaining simply allies of secular political elites. END
COMMENT.
JACOBS